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PERSISTENCE AND CHANGE IN THE
SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR MIGRATION SYSTEM -
A PHASE MODEL

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The labour migration system of South Africa is noted for its long history. In the local context the combination of two unique 'push' and 'pull' factors have effected the persistence of this system for over half a century. Influx control in the urban employment centres and communal tenure in the rural areas have jointly worked to slow down rural-urban inflows and have prevented the permanent stabilisation of rural-to-urban migrants in centres of employment. However, in recent times the legitimacy and effectiveness of influx control regulations have become the subject of considerable debate, whilst the pressure on arable land held in communal tenure in the rural areas is steadily increasing. The question arises, then, whether South Africa's labour migration system can continue to exert such a tight control over its labour force in future without seriously damaging the economy. In the light of these pressures, South Africa's labour migration system may be in need of revision.

This paper traces the institutionalisation of the migratory labour system in South Africa and identifies some of the strains to which the labour force working within the constraints of the system have been subjected in more recent times.

1. THE PATTERN OF LABOUR MIGRATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In Southern Africa, as in other parts of Africa the dominant pattern of labour migration is of a cyclical nature. Rural migrants spend a portion of their adult lives in wage labour away from their rural places of origin and return-migrate periodically. Cyclical migration is consistent with South Africa's apartheid policy in that it effectively controls the movement of black people and the rate of black urbanisation. The migrant labour system of South Africa perpetuates the idea that black workers of rural origin shall enter the urban-industrial labour centre in a working capacity only. All other requirements of workers - including political rights and social security needs, are to be met in their rural areas of origin.

The South African migrant labour system is extremely flexible (Prothero 1974: 38) in that it allows employers to adjust the size of

their labour force to the demands of the market. The system guarantees that during a downturn in the economy employers need not be saddled with a labour surplus. The cost of maintaining this flexible supply of labour is minimal as workers' social needs are largely to be met in the rural areas of origin. It is assumed that basic wages and simple working and living conditions are adequate for a migrant labour force. In any case the high turnover rate of contract workers should counteract any negative effects arising from a low standard of living and basic working conditions.

Migrants typically form a substratum in the society in which they enter in a working capacity only. Social benefits are pared to a minimum, as it is understood that such benefits that are offered accrue only to the worker and not to his family whose needs will be adequately covered in the rural area of origin. Regardless of actual marital status, migrants are typically treated as single men. Until very recently, migrant wage rates tended to be based on this consideration (cf Wilson 1942; Wilson 1972a).

The contract labour system in South Africa effectively precludes job mobility in the urban-industrial centres, hence aspirations for occupational aspirations which arise after the initial migration act also have to be met in the area of origin, a point to which we shall return later. In town, migrants are typically employed as unskilled workers for a contract period of approximately one year to eighteen months. The migrant labour system denies migrant workers the right to bring their families to live with them in town and limits their opportunities to actively seek work in occupations and geographical districts of their choice. Strict regulations control the entry of rural-based workseekers into the labour centres. Officially, rural migrant workers must be recruited in the home district. Loss of employment is automatically followed by an intermittent return to the home district where workseekers must wait to be recruited afresh. However, in practice, workseekers manage to circumvent these rules and regulations to a certain extent (cf Hofmeyr 1984).

Before 1968, migrant workers of rural origin could qualify for

urban rights in terms of long service with a single employer or in terms of uninterrupted residence at one approved urban address. However, after 1968 all rural migrants were allowed to enter the urban areas as contract workers only. Contracts were renewable annually. In more recent times the system of renewing contracts has been streamlined but tight controls still remain effective.

2. TWO OPPOSING VIEWS OF LABOUR MIGRANCY

In justification of the migrant labour system it has been pointed out that contract labour has simply been superimposed upon a more traditional way of life in which warriors and hunters spent long periods away from their families¹⁾. It is argued that the traditional social system was organised in such a way that it could cope with the absence of the male members of the community for longer periods of time. In this way of thinking, the traditional division of labour between the sexes is a reflection of the rural community's capacity to cope with labour migrancy.

However, this type of argument is not acceptable in most quarters. The migrant labour system has variously been criticised for its disruptive effect on family life, and also because it acts as a drain on the rural economy. Furthermore, the working and living conditions for migrant contract workers are viewed as inhuman and exploitative (Wilson, 1972a, b; Agency for Industrial Mission 1976). Most critics of the system are genuinely amazed that labour migrancy in Southern Africa has persisted for so long.

1) Linkages between warfare and migration are not uncommon in the field of migration. For example, Kubat and Hoffmann-Nowotny (1981: 324) demonstrate the similarity between migration and military service, drawing mainly on historical observations of the institution of *Reislaufen*. In their view, military service, like hunting, is essentially a variant of the roving principle, which they postulate as the chief motivator of migration. Moving closer to home Rosen-Prinz and Prinz (1978: 8) compare warfare with migration in their historical review of the migrant labour system in Swaziland.

At this juncture one should mention that critics are divided in their long-term forecasts for the migrant labour system. According to one school of thought, circular migration must inevitably give way to one-way migration at some stage. In this way of thinking, circular migration represents an economic disequilibrium which must eventually be resolved. In contrast to international migration elsewhere, South Africa's migrant labour system has built-in props which act as 'boosters' to artificially control migration, ostensibly for the benefit of both the supply and the demand side. If these props are removed, the migrant labour system in its present form will collapse and equilibrium will be restored.

According to a second viewpoint, the migrant labour system has persisted mainly because it has become a regular feature of South African society. Labour migrancy is an institution, and as such, its removal, however desirable from a human rights point of view, will have wide-reaching consequences (cf Nattrass 1977; Bell 1972: 355-356 for a relevant discussion of the Southern African situation; for a similar viewpoint concerning South American circular migration cf Laite 1978).

3. A PHASE MODEL OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MIGRANT LABOUR SYSTEM

Viewing the South African migrant labour system as an institution goes a long way towards explaining its persistence. Contrary to popular opinion the migrant labour system has not remained static. As any institution, it has evolved and undergone substantial changes in time. It is suggested here that the adaptation of the migrant labour system to changing circumstances has played a major part in ensuring its long-term stability.

An institution is shaped not only by the rules and regulations which are formulated within its charter. People who pass through an institution also determine its course. Similarly, migrant workers in reacting to the migrant labour system have helped to shape the migrant labour system as it operates today. As we shall see later, the migrant labour system, in the course of its evolution, may not always have been

the focus of negative reactions on the part of the workers.

In the following section, we shall briefly distinguish between three phases or institutional models of labour migrancy in Southern Africa. The phases are described in chronological order of their appearance but the descriptions are intended to be typical rather than historical. We shall distinguish between the early, the classical, and the modern migration system.

Against this institutional background, we shall seek to distill the changing significance of cyclical migration in terms of personal development and life satisfaction for the individual migrant.

3.1 Phase I: Early target migration

Labour migrancy was introduced into Southern Africa in the late 19th century when cheap labour was needed in the rapidly developing mining industry. Large-scale mining and agricultural enterprises were the first big employers of labour migrants. At this time labour was not forthcoming and negative incentives, such as hut taxes, were employed to force tribesmen to join the migrant labour force for short intervals in order to obtain cash for tax purposes (Skinner 1965).

In this early stage of labour migrancy, recruitment and conditions of employment are not sufficiently regulated so one cannot speak of a regular institution. Clearly, labour migrancy at this stage is beneficial only to the demand side. At this time, tribesmen may have regarded the migrant labour system as an external factor which was imposed upon the regular pattern of tribal life. Nevertheless, one might make the supposition that while the system of labour migrancy was still in its infancy, it did not pose a threat to the tribal way of life. In this early phase of labour migrancy, village life is the dominant mode of existence for labour migrants, interrupted only by some few brief spells in the work centre. The migrant career is typically of short duration and by mid-life a villager can expect to make no further trips to labour centres.

3.2 Phase II: Classical target migrancy

3.2.1 The institutionalisation of classical target migration

During this second phase, the system of labour migration is firmly established as a regular feature of the South African economy. The push and pull forces which regulate labour movements between the supplier and receiving areas are fully developed and ensure that industrial and agricultural needs for seasonal and contract labour are regularly met.

This period is also characterised by a change in the motivational structures underlying participation in labour migrancy. Whilst negative incentives still play a prominent role, they are gradually supplemented by positive motivations. The typical targets of the early phase of labour migrancy, such as the need to pay hut taxes, remain, but additional targets emerge, such as the need to make bridal wealth payments, purchase cattle, and fulfil modern consumer aspirations for clothing, bicycles, modern farming implements, education, etcetera.

More importantly, as labour migrancy becomes more institutionalised it also becomes an integral part of the traditional way of living. Tribal people become more accustomed to the benefits of cash wages and develop novel expectations and tastes for modern goods. At the same time seasonal and contract work away from home is taken only during the non-agricultural season and during other times in which labour is not needed at home. Thus, labour migrancy dovetails with subsistence farming and the two lifestyles are by and large compatible.

Social scientists observing the migrant labour scene during this classical period remark that labour migrancy has become a way of life among some tribesmen (cf Southall 1952; van Velsen 1961). It is no longer superimposed upon tribal life as in the early period, but is fully integrated into the traditional lifestyle of rural Africans. As migrants become better acquainted with the workings of a cash economy, they also learn to appreciate some of its advantages. In contrast to the migration of the earlier period, migration now becomes 'voluntary'

in the sense that there is a desire to acquire cash to fulfil needs which occur from time to time in the course of a lifetime.

3.2.2 The rationality of classical migration

The classical phase of labour migrancy is possibly the only period in which the benefits of labour migration outweigh the costs for both the supply and the demand side. According to Sheila van der Horst (as cited by Bell 1972: 355) the system at one time "represented a reasonable compromise for both African and employer". It is most certainly this period which springs to mind when economists such as M.P. Todaro and Elliot J. Berg argue some of the more beneficial aspects of labour migration. The theory of the backward-sloping labour supply put forward by Berg (1961) accounts for the typical motivations of the classical labour migrant. It also justifies low wages for migrants. According to this theory, low wages need not depress work satisfaction among migrants but will ensure a constant supply of labour.

During the classical migration phase, labour migrancy becomes a familiar routine in many rural communities which derive maximum benefit from it by deploying labour at both fronts, the urban and the rural. The classical migrant typically dovetails his agricultural work and wage labour. Berg (1961) maintains that a clever migrant is capable of operating successfully on two fronts simultaneously: at the home base and at the workplace. Thus, labour migration supplements income derived from agricultural pursuits and improves the standard of living in the home community. Economic theories depict the classical migrant of this period as a rational man, who derives real benefits from the migrant labour system by utilising his resources wisely and by finely timing his entries and his exits into and out of the migrant labour system. For example, it is demonstrated that it can pay dividends for a rural community to do without the labour of some members of its community for longer periods of time if these migrants eventually find well-paying jobs in the work centres and remit of their cash earnings to the home community (Todaro 1971).

Under such circumstances it is also understandable that the classical target migrant might have been willing to forego social security benefits at the place of work. It would be rational for a migrant to minimise his consumption in the workcentre in order to maximise the economic return on wage labour to the family left behind. In some instances, reduction of demands concerning working and living conditions and social security benefits may have been accepted by the migrant as the price to pay for instant cash earnings (a similar argument is put forward by Hume, 1973, for migrant workers in Europe).

In all probability the classical target worker, like his predecessor, perceived the work situation in terms of its instrumental value only. The hardships endured to secure and keep a job until a particular economic advantage was gained may simply have been accepted as part of labour migrancy. Older reports of labour migration cite cases of migrants covering distances of hundreds of kilometres on foot to come to work on the mines, the predominant employers of migrant labour at the time. Hardships, dangers and indignities may have been the risks which a classical migrant thought it necessary to endure in order to secure a cash income for his rural-based family.

Some social scientists argue that the system of labour migrancy can be beneficial to the rural community as long as the community maintains strict control over the movements and allegiances of its absentee members. It follows that under such conditions the migrant labour system need not pose a serious threat to the stability of the rural family.

Just as labour migrancy in the early and classical era did not necessarily disrupt the social fabric of the village, there is evidence which suggests that the migrant labour force of the classical era remains relatively unaffected by the negative influences of city life. Contrary to initial expectations, the migrant labour system of this era does not appear to cause widespread schizophrenia among migrants

who are forced to divide their lives between the city workplace and the rural village. As migrancy emerges as an accepted way of life among rural blacks, labour migrants tend to adapt to alternating lifestyles by compartmentalising value systems to suit the requirements of a particular moment (Gluckman 1961).

3.2.3 Protective systems for the classical migrant worker

Certain mechanisms operate during this period of labour migrancy which ensure the mental integrity of the migrant labourer. Migrants typically set out to find wage labour with their peer group, which continues to function as a support group throughout a migrant lifetime (cf O'Connell 1980). Having proved their manhood in the world of work, members of the peer group return home periodically to perform the social rituals required of each passing stage of life. The initiation into the tribe perhaps being the most significant milestone and common experience which forges enduring links between peer-group members. The members of this peer group work together, play together, share the same living quarters in town, and reminisce about home life during their spare time, and how they intend later to return home as heroes. During the classical period of labour migrancy, a certain prestige is attached to labour migration, which is not only selective of the fittest and most enterprising lads in the village, but also of the best integrated.

Philip Mayer's (1961, 1962) work has given us many insights into this type of 'encapsulation' of migrants in their peer groups. The mechanism of encapsulation shields migrants from the negative effects of urban life, and sustains them while they are exposed to the trials and tribulations of a foreign working and living environment. Classical migrant workers who are fully integrated into the peer group system may remain naively unaware of their urban environment, others may remain aloof by choice. Mayer (1980) describes groups of migrants who go to great lengths to uphold the traditional rural values and consciously reject urban values as decadent and overly materialistic. During the classical phase of labour migrancy, such groups are outwardly conspicuous in that they shun modern western dress and continue to wear

traditional dress in town. In essence, it is perfectly possible for the encapsulated migrant to be in the city but not of it.¹⁾

More importantly, encapsulation ensures the psychological well-being of migrants removed from their home environment. Migrants involved in such a support system retain the value system of the village intact. The rural value system renders migrants immune to the corruptive influences of urban life and the migrant labour system. There is also evidence to suggest that the classical migrant encapsulated in his peer group experiences fewer urban-associated problems and may be able to lead a fairly carefree life. The peer group is also the custodian of traditional moral values. For example, burial societies ensure that members are given a decent burial which conforms with traditional custom. Mutual aid societies also guard against men neglecting their family obligations.

It was most certainly expedient for employers to actively support the encapsulation mechanism introduced by the migrant workers themselves into the classical migrant labour system. Employers could use encapsulation as a means to isolate migrant workers from the mainstream of the emergent urban-based black workforce and accelerate the substratification process within the workforce in the urban-industrial centre. Also, a stratified workforce ensured a certain degree of flexibility of the labour supply. Employers may have made calculations along the following lines: as long as encapsulated migrant contract workers retain the values of their 'homeboy' reference group, they will not be inclined to make invidious comparisons with the emergent permanent worker group concerning the latter's better working and living conditions, and increased opportunities for job mobility. Moreover, the labour

- 1) Similar systems which serve to retain the interaction patterns of the place of origin, are known to operate in one-way as well as circular migration systems (Kubat, Hoffmann-Nowotny 1981: 319). According to Gans (1962) the ethnic groups encapsulated in "urban villages" may last indefinitely. Essentially, ethnic groups are the migrant's social organisations and represent a re-articulation of the social ties left behind.

force encapsulated in the peer group system will be disciplined within its own ranks, and most importantly, it will be prepared to comply with all the rules and regulations of the work organisation if these are mediated through the peer group system.

During the classical era the encapsulation control mechanism is also reflected in the socio-spatial arrangements at the place of work. The worker compound separates contract migrants from the mainstream of urban life. Members of the contract migrant workforce are typically recruited through the 'homeboy' social network, and accommodated in homogeneous 'homeboy' groups in the worker compound.

However, not all encapsulating peer groups of the classical era are carry-overs from village life. During this period urban-based groups are formed which fulfil similar roles. The ingoma dance groups are a case in point. For purposes of this paper it is important that the ingoma dance tradition among migrants is a reflection of both the persistence and the adaptability of the migrant labour system. Therefore it might be useful to describe the function of ingoma dance groups in some detail.

The ingoma dance is typically a migrant dance with traditional rural overtones, and members of the permanent urban labour force would usually not wish to associate themselves with it. According to H.J. Thomas (1983), an expert on ingoma dance among Durban migrants, the dance may have its origin in tribal, warrior dance, but it has been modified in the urban setting. To illustrate this point, Thomas cites the case where ingoma dancers perform dance routines in the city which differ substantially from those routines which are commonly danced in their own areas of origin.

Ingoma dance groups became extremely popular among migrants during the classical period of labour migration and are still sponsored by employers of contract labour to this day. The ingoma dance appears to have been encouraged by employers of labour to instil discipline into the labour force at a time of widespread labour unrest in the 1930's.

At this time employers issued members of dance groups with badges which also served to identify them as law-abiding elements in the migrant labour force. Even today, the ingoma dancers observed by Thomas tend to identify themselves with the more peaceful elements in the labour force. In this connection it is perhaps telling that the criteria currently used for judging the ingoma dances performed in local competitions feature elements such as "unity of movement" and "troop discipline". Frequently the dance leader doubles as the man in charge of the production team at work.

3.2.4 Social security during the classical phase of labour migrancy

From this discussion of the encapsulation mechanism we gain a picture of the classical migrant as an essentially rural-oriented worker who remains psychologically insulated from all facets of urban life despite long-term exposure to the urban environment during a migrant career. This despite the fact that the classical target worker tends to spend a greater proportion of his adult life in the urban-industrial setting than the early target worker. Nevertheless, the classical migrant, similar to his predecessor, retains his rural frame of reference and is permanently reintegrated into rural life by mid-life. The final return to the rural home is not an incisive, traumatic event, because the social network of the village extends to the urban workplace.

Furthermore, the classical migrant has adapted to a system which provides no social security benefits to its workers. Under such circumstances, intermittent periods of unemployment between contracts are essential for the welfare of the classical migrant and his family. During periods of unemployment spent at the rural home rural values are reinforced, and investments in rural security are made in monetary terms and in the form of goodwill. Remittances are frequently made in the form of gifts to traditional leaders who keep rural resources, such as land, in trust while migrants work in town. During intermittent returns to the area of origin, the migrant learns to fulfil his duties and obligations in the home community. For the classical migrant this practice of role-playing is essential if he is to be reintegrated into

rural society as a full member of the local community after retirement from urban-industrial work.

Thus, the migrant contract worker conforming and adapting to the exigencies of the migrant labour system during the classical era of labour migrancy makes regular social security payments throughout his working lifetime. Although the urban employers of the classical era make no welfare payments to contract workers as such, labour migrancy allows the migrant sufficient time off from work to make his own arrangements. It is also important to note that the migrant labour system of the classical era requires that the gratification of many of the migrant's social needs must be deferred until such time as the migrant returns permanently to the family he has left behind in the rural village. Thus, return migration is indeed the end-goal and the culmination of the classical migrant's working life.

To conclude this discussion of the classical era of labour migrancy, one might remark that this was the 'golden era' of labour migration. The classical era of labour migrancy is characterised chiefly by compliance and adaptation of the workforce to a system imposed upon a traditional way of life. Theoretically, both the supply and the demand side were blissfully unaware of or blind to the long-term consequences of labour migrancy for the development of the labour centre and the rural periphery. In the next phase which follows after the classical era of labour migrancy, the happy coexistence between the employers and suppliers of labour gives way to a less harmonious relationship. Outwardly, the labour migration system of the new era, which for the want of a better name, we shall call the 'modern' system, may differ very little from the classical one from which it evolved. However, some subtle differences exist.

3.3 Phase III: The modern migration system

The modern era sees several types of migrants and urban workers rubbing shoulders at the workplace. During the modern migration era the ranks of the classical migrants are thinning (Mayer 1980). There remain some few pockets of encapsulated migrants, and one would expect the

migrants who conform to the classical pattern of migrancy to be represented mainly in the older cohorts of the migrant labour force.

During the modern migration phase the meaning of migrancy changes dramatically. Superficially seen, the modern migrant's motivations are possibly very similar to those of the classical migrant. However, the modern migrant operates within a revised set of constraints. In the modern era, the labour surplus of the less developed rural areas has increased enormously, whilst the rural resource base has become impoverished. Under these circumstances, the urban-industrial economy acts as a powerful magnet. However, stricter controls on migrant mobility are introduced during the modern era which limit access to employment opportunities for migrants of rural origin. 1968 Influx control legislation effectively creates a permanent contract labour force of rural migrants with few or no opportunities of status change.

Due to longer exposure to western-industrial influences, the modern migrant's standard of living and expectations have risen enormously. The typical targets of classical migrancy included sporadic cash requirements for bride wealth, investment in cattle, and minimal education for children. During the modern era these classical targets have been transformed into permanently unsatisfied needs and wants. As a consequent, the modern migrant has become a slave to the migrant labour system. The modern migrant is a permanent target worker for the duration of a working lifetime (Nelson 1976). For the permanent target worker, the motivation to migrate is economic necessity rather than sporadic cash needs. Regular household expenses drain his earnings and make it virtually impossible for him to save. Thus, successful contact with the urban-industrial world has improved the standard of living of modern migrants and their dependents to the extent that it has become a liability.

In sum, the push forces propelling modern migrants to seek urban wage labour are dominant. This applies not only for the simple targets of the classical era but for a succession of never-ending targets

commensurate with the raised expectations of this period. Expectations and the standard of living have risen to such an extent that wage incomes are needed to maintain an adequate standard of living and indeed to substitute for rather than to supplement the rural subsistence base. It is at this point that the classical target worker has become a permanent target worker and at this stage that the myth of the alternating circular migrant, the "man of two worlds" (Houghton 1960; Lipton 1980) is exploded by the emergence of the "man of no world", whose resource base is shrinking in one world and who is effectively denied access to another world (Schlemmer 1976, 1983).

During the modern period the long-term effects of labour migration on the rural social system have become more and more evident. Agricultural production has decreased due to over-utilisation of rural resources. Over-population has led to land shortages which in turn has diminished the carrying capacity of the land. Increased wealth in the form of cattle has led to extensive soil erosion and permanent settlement has negatively affected the agricultural yields. Structural constraints which further limit migrant access to the rural resource base include land reform and resettlement of rural people. In short, the rural resource base is steadily decreasing in the modern era.

Under these circumstances there is little incentive to invest in rural resources or to play-act in rural roles during a working lifetime. The role of subsistence farming is assigned to those who are too young or too old to work in town (regarding the latter Dasgupta, 1981, speaks of senilization of rural communities). There are indications that the rural economy has adapted to this new attitude on the part of migrants by allowing for a lump sum investment in land later in life or at retirement rather than expecting migrants to build up goodwill in the rural community gradually in the course of a lifetime. At the urban end, many modern migrants isolate themselves from the peer group system in town. As a result the traditional rural authorities and the family left behind no longer have a tight hold on the migrant as in former days.

3.3.1 Quasi-stabilisation among modern migrants

Theoretically, the set of structural constraints outlined above would set the scene in which circular and repeat migration would gradually give way to one-way migration, and a large proportion of the migrant contract labour force could be expected to settle permanently in town. Under normal circumstances in which migration patterns are an accurate reflection of the economic opportunity structure, this set of constraints would have paved the way for one-way migration. However, in South Africa, the apartheid system has artificially retained the flexibility of the rural labour supply through influx control legislation and has thereby created a perpetuum mobile of cyclical migration. In South Africa, the artificial bolstering of the urban push and the rural pull forces has effectively stemmed one-way migration.

One must mention in passing that a small proportion of the migrant workforce of the classical and modern era will have managed to set foot permanently in town. This category of stabilised workers of the classical era are the forefathers of the so-called urban blacks of the modern era. In this connection it is important to note that work and residential roles are closely interwoven in a Catch-22 type situation in South Africa. Before 1968 a rural migrant might qualify for urban residential rights either in terms of seniority of residence or occupation, but in actual fact, it was not strictly possible to qualify on one count only. In order to seek for work a migrant had to have secured an accommodation base. However, accommodation of a more formal nature was only granted to migrants who could provide proof of formal employment. Nevertheless, at some stage enterprising migrants who may have wished to achieve some type of urban security solved this problem and became permanently or quasi-stabilised in town. We use the term quasi-stabilised here, because as in so many other parts of Africa, the rural "sheet-anchor" or rural "haven of safety" (cf Brown *et al* 1970) has been retained.

It is perhaps more accurate to speak of quasi-stabilised migrants rather than urban immigrants (denoting permanent residence

until death) in the Southern African context. It has been observed that a large proportion of South African migrants who have obtained urban rights still maintain rural links and expect to retire to their areas of origin. In fact, these urban-based migrants may send their children back to the rural home in their early stages of life, so the migrants' offspring may effectively embark on a migrant career path similar to that of their own. This practice is better understood if we consider that it has been policy to make the urban areas unattractive places to live in for blacks. For example, until recently, urban education facilities were purposely neglected in the urban areas so that migrants would not be tempted to bring their children to be educated in town (Bell 1972: 355; cf also Heisler 1974 for a similar policy of retarding labour stabilisation in urban areas in Zambia). We have already remarked on the lack of urban social security which necessitates rural return at retirement age.

During the modern era, the high rate of unemployment following the world recession has increased competition for jobs in the labour force, and a modern migrant practising the career interruptions indulged in by classical migrants would stand little chance of reentering the migrant labour system at a later date. Thus, planned returns to the rural home for longer periods of time during a working lifetime have been largely replaced by involuntary returns when a migrant has been declared redundant by his employer or has lost his job. Similarly, older migrants may delay the final return home indefinitely if they have no savings, because they stand little chance of regaining an urban job.

In many aspects, then, the permanent target worker of the modern era is almost indistinguishable from his more stabilised counterpart. Gone are the days when migrants left their workplaces in town to assist with tasks in the rural areas during the agricultural season. Similarly, the timing of long leave to coincide with the agricultural cycle has largely fallen by the wayside. Only older migrants remember the days when a target worker could afford to interrupt his working career for longer periods between trips to town.

As time goes on, the obligatory report to the recruitment office in the rural home base introduced in the new era, has been streamlined and a contract worker has the opportunity to come back to his old job after his annual leave on the so-called call-in card system. On the other hand, since 1968 a migrant can theoretically no longer qualify for urban rights.

The recommendations of recently formed commissions of inquiry into labour matters have effectively tightened influx control regulations for migrant workers seeking employment to the advantage of blacks living permanently in the urban areas. On the other hand a court ruling of 1983 granted a migrant contract worker the right to bring his family to live with him in town on the grounds of continuous service. It remains to be seen if this ruling sets a precedence for migrants wishing to escape the restrictions of the migrant labour system. So far only isolated migrants have come forward to claim urban residential rights for their families. However, if larger numbers of migrants were to avail themselves of this advantage the distinctions between the contract and the permanent urban workforce would become minimal.

It would appear then, that unlike the clear-cut divisions in the black workforce described by Mayer (1961) in his classical work on labour migrancy of the earlier era, the distinctions between various classes of urban-industrial workers of the modern era tend to be more subtle. At this point it will be necessary to define the distinguishing characteristics of the early, classical, and modern migrant types in qualitative terms. Let us look at the manner in which migrants evaluate their working careers and at the quality of migrant life in general.

4. THE QUALITY OF MIGRANT LIFE

The distinction between the classical and the modern migrant can best be described in terms of differential quality of life. However, before attempting to make such an assessment, let us define quality of life.

4.1 A working definition of life quality

Obviously, the quality of life concept is a relative one. There is no absolute standard of privilege or deprivation. The concept of relative deprivation, the negative mode of life quality, is literally as old as the hills and has variously come under scholarly scrutiny in the last decades. Among others Stouffer *et al.* (1949), Merton (1957), Davis (1959), Davies (1962), Runciman (1966), and Gurr (1970) have provided new insights into the concept. More recently, the concept of relative deprivation has been formalised in the so-called gap theories of life satisfaction or deprivation (Andrews, Withey 1976; Campbell *et al.* 1976; McKennell 1978; Andrews, McKennell 1980; McKennell, Andrews 1980, 1983; Mason, Faulkenberry 1978; Michalos 1980, 1982). In this formal statement relative deprivation or privilege lends itself to rigid empirical testing.

According to the gap-theory of life satisfaction, life satisfaction is an aggregate of individual life satisfactions experienced in various aspects or values in life; life satisfaction being defined as the 'gap' between expectation and achievement in life in general or in its various aspects and values.

Researchers are agreed that life satisfaction and deprivation can be subjectively experienced and also measured at the global or aggregate level as well as in specific facets of life. In its theoretical and empirical application the gap model refers to both objective and subjective evaluations of satisfactions, privileges, achievements, and aspirations.

One might argue that the gap model does not take sufficient cognisance of the important distinction between expectations and aspirations. It is suggested here that the more subtle distinction between aspiration and expectation made, for example, by Gurr (1970) may be bracketted for the sake of simplicity and convenience by entering only the more salient of the two elements into the satisfaction equation. In the most simple case, expectations will equal aspirations. Aspirations may also outstrip expectations,

in which case it may be more feasible to refer to the element which most closely approximates the real-life standard of reference. However, the subtle difference between aspiration and expectation may qualify the end experience or life satisfaction.

This last point is important as it applies to the migrant experience. Previous research undertaken by the author has revealed that among older migrants it is expectations rather than aspirations which tend to serve as a reference guide for evaluating their life circumstances. It was also discovered that the aspirations of older migrants, who might be expected to conform to the classical model of migrancy, had been blunted by the recurrence of thwarted aspirations. Thus, the aspirations of older migrants have frequently been adjusted downwards to match the rewards which they have painfully learnt to expect.

Gaps between achievement and aspiration can result from various combinations of increases and decreases of constituent elements. For example, an increase in satisfaction occurs when achievement increases more rapidly than aspirations rise. An increase in satisfaction is also manifest if aspirations increase more slowly than achievements, or if aspirations decrease. In quantitative terms, the resulting satisfaction may be equal in all three instances, but a qualitative or experiential difference between these types of satisfactions might be postulated.

This difference in the meaning of satisfaction can be expressed in terms of levels of satisfaction, using the level of aspiration as the pegging point or reference standard for determining satisfaction levels (Møller, Schlemmer 1981). Thus, one can refer to various levels or orders of satisfaction, or alternatively to 'active' and 'passive' satisfaction. In the last case, 'passive' satisfaction denotes that self-actualisation or personal development is singularly lacking in the experience of satisfaction.

4.2 The quality of working life in successive phases of labour migrancy

Let us apply the concept of quality of life to the three types of migrants distinguished in this paper.

4.2.1 The quality of working life for early migrants

According to the gap model of quality of life outlined above, we would expect the early migrant to have suffered from negative job satisfaction. Motivations to migrate at this phase of migration history are determined wholly by so-called push forces. The labour exporting society sees little or no benefit of the work of their migrants because wage earnings are immediately reabsorbed by the labour importing society in the form of taxes.

4.2.2 The quality of working life for classical migrants

During the classical period of labour migrancy, the quality of working life may have reached a one-time peak, at least in theoretical terms. Motivations to join the labour force during this period have shifted towards the positive pole. Migrants are increasingly in a position to work the migrant labour system to their own advantage so that the rural community benefits from the cash income. As we have seen, particularly in the case of the prototypical classical migrant: Mayer's 'red' or 'encapsulated' migrant, the retention of the rural frame of reference serves to enhance the value of job benefits. Due to the fact that the rewards of work are exported from a higher developed economy into a less developed one, their value is instantly inflated. Furthermore, as we have pointed out, the preservation of a rural and less materialistic orientation through the encapsulated peer group tends to further enhance the value of urban rewards.

Thus, during the period of classical migrancy, achievements in the world of work are increasing at a faster rate than rural aspirations and expectations. In terms of the gap model of quality of life, the classical migrant contract workers are in a unique position to experience positive, albeit most certainly lower-order satisfactions from labour migrancy.

At this point we should perhaps emphasise that the job satisfaction to be gained from contract work during the early and classical era is purely of an extrinsic nature. Given the nature of the menial jobs offered to migrant workers, this is to be expected. As one social scientist has wryly observed, only a robot may derive intrinsic work satisfaction from menial work. Nevertheless, extrinsic rewards of work, such as cash income, may have represented true value during the classical period of migrancy. As we have noted earlier, its real value in the eyes of the migrant was, in any case, likely to be inflated.

There is every reason to believe that the classical migrant does not view the urban industrial setting as the arena in which to achieve non-monetary gratifications from work. Higher-order gratifications from work are to be gained in the area of origin. To illustrate this point, I wish to draw on some earlier research observations which demonstrate how, from the classical migrant's point of view, the city and the job is valued purely in instrumental terms. The conception of the migrant contract worker in the city conveyed to the author by male migrant workers in pre-independence Zimbabwe was that of a hunter who stalks his prey in the city. As these workers explained: *"The city is our hunting ground - we are only hunting here; our homes are elsewhere in the country"*.

The hunter analogy is very apt. It projects an image of the city as a dangerous and exciting place of work, which provides an opportunity to demonstrate one's prowess and skills. Success in this environment is also dependent upon an element of luck. The hunter analogy evokes the notion of a series of forages and dangerous missions into enemy territory to stalk and hunt down one's prey. The migrant-hunter may have to wait for longer periods until he achieves a kill, but this delay is worthwhile if the final outcome is positive. Most importantly for our argument here is the idea that the spoils of the hunt are not consumed at the place of the kill itself but are brought back from the hunt to the home base. Here the successful hunter is given a hero's welcome and the spoils of the hunt are consumed by the family left behind.

4.2.3 The quality of working life for modern migrants

By contrast to the limited job satisfactions available to classical migrants, the opportunities for deriving work rewards are far more varied for modern migrants and include higher as well as lower-level satisfactions. Thanks to his greater commitment to urban-industrial work, the permanent target worker may be able to achieve some occupational continuity and mobility which provides a basis for the intrinsic experience of satisfaction from work. Nevertheless, the negative modes predominate as the majority of the contract migrants of the modern era still occupy the lower rungs of the job hierarchy.

Regarding extrinsic job satisfaction, the value of monetary rewards of work is deflated for modern migrants due to rising costs of living and migrants' expectations of a higher standard of living. It is also possible and recent research is suggestive of this supposition, that the modern migrant is less compliant than his classical counterpart and is therefore less willing to suffer the indignities and injustices of the migrant labour system. Modern migrants appear also to be less willing or capable of relying on the rural social security system during periods of involuntary unemployment as evidenced in recent labour unrest in South Africa. Whereas the classical migrant might accept the migrant labour system as a necessary evil and might even attempt to rationalise his membership in the system, the modern migrant will tend to stress the injustices inherent in the system. Thus, the modern migrant is more likely to feel alienated and frustrated than his predecessor. Under such circumstances, we might expect that the larger proportion of modern migrants would be dissatisfied with their job situation.

So far, we have considered primarily the behaviour and actions of individual migrants. During the modern era there is, however, some evidence of a shift from individual toward group reactions among labour

migrants.¹⁾ Labour strike actions which are typically motivated by pay issues, are fairly common occurrences in the modern era. In fact, one might consider whether the isolation of hostel-dwelling migrants does not serve to reinforce solidarity among the ranks of dissatisfied marginal workers during periods of unrest. Despite this new trend toward mass strikes the dominant pattern of non-conformity tends to be based on individual rather than collective reactions. In the modern era there are still considerable constraints on migrants' participation in collective bargaining processes. Unionization among contract migrants is still very low.²⁾ It is also individuals rather than groups who seek to penetrate the urban system in terms of the quasi-stabilization mechanism discussed earlier or who seek voluntary withdrawal from the labour migration system through return-migration.

Apart from collective solutions, what options are open to individual migrants seeking a higher quality of life in the modern era of labour migration? From a theoretical point of view, one might stipulate that the modern migrant would have to give up his migrant status in order to achieve satisfaction in all spheres of life. Expressed in structural terms, this implies that in order to achieve personal well-being the migrant would have to resolve the inconsistencies inherent in the migrant status. This solution inevitably calls for the individual to shed his migrant status and opt either for permanent return migration or for permanent settlement in town.

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- 1) This is a basic distinction in the macro-theoretical explanation of migration processes put forward by Hoffmann-Nowotny (1981; cf also Richmond's, 1983, review article). Hoffmann-Nowotny argues that structural tensions generate anomy which may be individual, collective, or class-based. According to this view there is a tendency in modern mass migration for immigrants to be limited to certain lower levels of satisfaction in terms of "undercasting", which could lead to renewed migration. In the South African context migrant undercasting, which has been described here in terms of encapsulation mechanisms, is inextricably related with cyclical migration rather than stabilization in town.
 - 2) A 1978 survey conducted among Durban-based migrants revealed some 7% trade union membership among the 510 Zulus included in the sample.

As an aside, one might remark that the classical worker was probably more willing than the modern migrant to resolve his status inconsistencies by straddling two worlds, the rural and the urban. For example, from the viewpoint of the classical migrant the occupation of a lower status position on a particular status dimension in town may have been cancelled out by the fact that a higher status position could be attained on the same dimension in the rural context.

The modern migrant, however, appears to be more determined to resolve the status inconsistencies, which are by definition inherent in the migrant status, in one world. Small minorities of modern migrants have managed to circumvent influx control regulations in order to settle permanently in town with their families. However, contrary to popular thinking, recent research suggests that the typical modern migrant seeks a rural rather than an urban solution to the split-personality of the migrant (Møller, Schlemmer 1979, 1981). That is, under the given circumstances, the majority of modern migrants in South Africa would opt for permanent rural rather than urban residence if equivalent opportunities to earn a living were available.¹⁾ By the same token, quasi-stabilisation rather than permanent settlement in the work centre is the more popular option for migrants seeking to resolve their status inconsistencies during a working lifetime. The increasing numbers of migrants who are seeking alternative accommodation during their working lifetime as illegal lodgers and peri-urban settlers are examples of modern migrants' attempts to ease some of the strains and inconsistencies of the migrant labour system. According to this long-term migrant strategy, status consistency is achieved first in the urban area during a working lifetime, and later in the rural area after retiring from labour migrancy. Despite its current popularity, this modern pattern of circular migrancy may not persist for long. This is due to the shrinking land resources available to labour migrants. One of the basic conditions for classical labour migrancy no longer holds.

1) See also the paper by Schlemmer and Møller in this volume.

Clearly, modern migrancy in South Africa is at the cross-roads. Its longer-term persistence will depend largely on the system's capacity to accommodate the rising expectations of a modernising labour force which requires greater opportunities for job advancement and new types of social security benefits. Therefore, a reappraisal of the basic assumptions which underly the migrant labour system is essential. The question of relaxing influx control measures to increase employment opportunities and promote job advancement is particularly pertinent. Access to alternative landholdings for landless migrants is an equally pressing issue in view of the changing rural circumstances of the modern migration era. If such questions are not resolved satisfactorily, discontent among modern migrants can only be expected to continue to rise in future.

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